

Irie and Olgee The walk

By Jackie Bralove

The magnificent high desert mountains of northern New Mexico are hard places for animals. In the wild they struggle for water and food against fierce competition. The winters are cold and snowy; the summers hot and dry. The snow gets deep and melts into sticky mud like gooey chocolate pudding. In summer I have seen the soil crack open with drought so severe that the little river trout must swim in tiny circles for weeks in those streams that do not dry up completely.

For house cats, deservedly, the going is much easier.

Olgee and Irie were my second generation of cats to live in those mountains just 13 miles south of the Colorado border north of Taos. I always have at least one Abyssinian and usually one of another breed as well. Irie was the Abby, a large altered

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Shandin basks on her sunny balcony

Suggestions to improve Fitness Center accessibility

By Joe de Angelis

Sometimes people are forced to be Monday morning quarterbacks because no one will listen to them before or during the game. The issue of accessibility to the new Fitness Center (FC) has been raised in *The Times of Montebello* twice in the last two months as well as being discussed in other forums. Ms. Sue Priestland addressed her inability to access the FC in the April issue of *The Times of Montebello* and received a non-answer from the Board of Directors (BOD).

Like Ms. Betsy Sprouse, who addressed this issue again in the May issue

The responses from the BOD and Management, are, in my opinion, inadequate, nonresponsive, and ignore the legitimate and reasonable concerns of residents. The Fitness Center is supposed to be for the health and wellbeing of all Montebello residents; this includes ease of access, which does not exist at this time.

of *The Times of Montebello*, I, too, was appalled and incensed by the BOD's insensitive response to Ms. Priestland's plight. I was even more appalled and incensed when I read the BOD's answer to Ms.

Sprouse's letter, which reinforced their earlier negative, insensitive response. This is not to say that the BOD does a poor job, on the contrary, they do an excellent job of managing Montebello. However sometimes the BOD and all those associated with a new project, like the FC, think themselves omniscient

and only seem to be concerned with doing everything in compliance with rules and regulations. They would never consider reversing a decision or giving in to resident's suggestions, especially if they ran counter to the BOD's decisions.

The responses from the BOD and Management, are, in my opinion, inadequate, nonresponsive, and ignore the legitimate and reasonable concerns of residents. The FC is supposed to be for the health and wellbeing of all Montebello residents; this includes ease of access, which does not exist at this time. There are two issues regarding the doors: one is the force required to open the doors, and the other is the number of doors one must go through in order to get to the FC.

Although the FC was ostensibly designed to be in compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), it apparently was not and still is not as

Continued on page 4

of Alexandria before coming to Montebello, where Pat participated in many community activities. She also volunteered at the Kennedy Center.

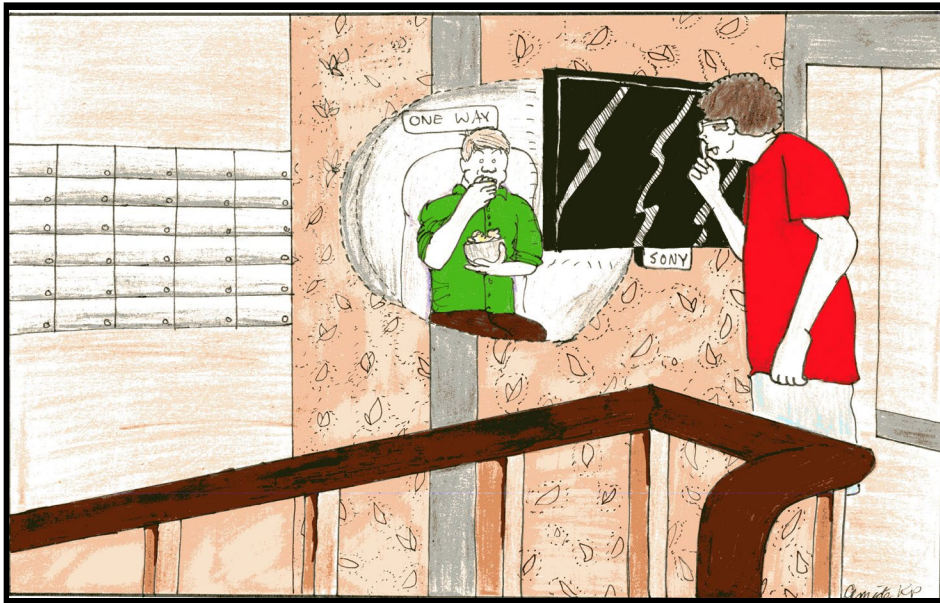
She is survived by two sons and her daughter, Sara Dawson of 9303 Zyle Road, Austin, Tx., 78737. – *Trish Green*

A modest proposal

In America we are allowed only to vote FOR a candidate. Why can't we – if we so choose – vote AGAINST said candidate? Rather than adding one vote to the candidate's total it would subtract one vote.

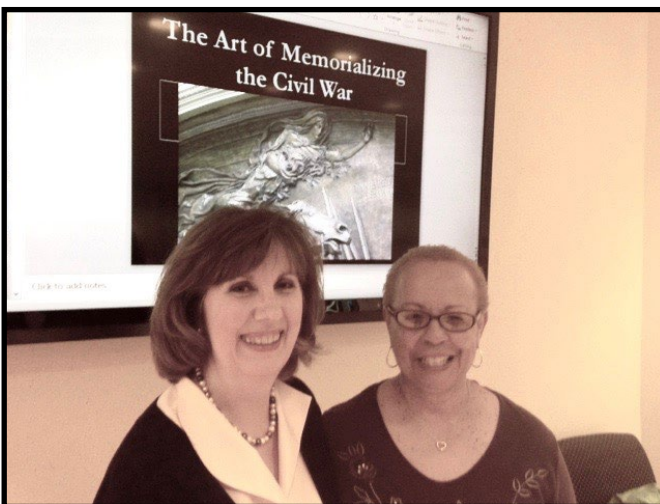
In 2016, Republicans and Independents fearful of Trump will be voting for Hillary. Meanwhile, Democrats and Independents fearful of Hillary will be voting for Trump. Could there not be a more positive approach, allowing us to have a true AGAINST vote?

Such a system offers great promise in an era when all the candidates basically suck, and, voter turnout is frighteningly low. A new and more positive negative approach should help us confront both problems. Perhaps there is a candidate of whom one has especially negative perceptions. Presently, the only way one can vote AGAINST this person is to vote FOR someone else. Shouldn't there be a more direct way??? – *Richard Titus*



The REAL purpose of the monitors in the lobbies: one-way mirrors

Voices on the 37



Susan Cumbey (left), director of Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site, with Montebello Speaker Series chair Guin Jones at the April 27 lecture about Civil War art.

Attention, foodies

People should get to know **Grounded Coffee** in the little center where Telegraph Rd. meets South Kings Hwy. Great atmosphere (mommies and well-behaved kiddies, along with the rest of us). Great munchies, baked goods, and coffee.

The Swiss Bakery on Braddock just west of the Beltway. Well worth the drive, check out their website at www.theswissbakery.com. And, right next to a fascinating huge Korean supermarket.

Balducci's bagel and lox... definitely special! Also, their bistro dinners will be two meals for any normal person, and could feed an entire village in North Korea.

Roseina's carry-out on Shenandoah just off Ft. Hunt Rd. All kinds of nice goodies. For some reason they don't have coffee.

Bread and Water, a new bakery in the Belle View Shopping Center – *Richard Titus*

In memoriam

I just learned that Patricia (Pat) Reed, a longtime Montebello resident in Building 4 until about five years ago, died recently in Austin, Tx.

Pat was born in Florida and graduated from De Pauw University in Indiana. She and her husband, who passed away some 10 years ago, raised their family in the Hollin Hills neighborhood

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male, and Olgee was a very feminine Blue Tonkinese. They were supposed to go outside only with me.

We lived on the slope of the Latir national wilderness on six acres bordered on three sides by a stream which ran all year, a luxury in those parts. Great cottonwood trees dominated a narrow perimeter of small woods, punctuated with pinyon pine, scrub oak, cedar, mountain juniper and wild rose and raspberry bushes.

Originally, this had been Jicarilla Apache summer camp ground. It was very beautiful. Just yards away from the stream the hard land could only support chamisa, sage and a few pinyon and oak, but those provided a habitat for snakes, tarantulas and God knows what else crawling around. The stream attracted all the animals of the region including elk; the neighbors' cows and horses; bears, especially during bad drought; and of course, the dreaded coyotes. So Irie and Olgee lived inside, except for our late afternoon walk.

around four or five o'clock in all seasons except deep winter they would start milling around the door, waiting for my signal, our special call. "Come on. Irie, Olgee, could come now." Unnecessary words, useful only to confirm their happy anticipation. Tails sprung up straight, fur bristled glossy in the sunlight, eyes shining, they waited at the door. There was a ritual for the walk, a path followed. First all three of us would follow the paved path through the garden in the back, down to the stream. Both cats would run and leap, demonstrating their feline prowess. Ricocheting lightly off the Cottonwoods, Irie would run up their trunks a short distance while Olgee leapt horizontally through the air, both confident of my appreciation. I would laugh and praise them: "What beautiful



A pastel drawing of Irie

cats, what lovely animals – you are the best cats alive in the world." They both knew that very well!

The ground near the stream was quite soft, covered with leaves and pine needles where the life-giving water flowed precious and sweet. Everything smelled clean and new. We would wander slowly along those few hundred feet, each cat investigating almost every inch, until we reached the edge of the perimeter where the earth was hard again and the sage began. Because the hard, dry ground hurt the tender pads of her silver paws, Olgee would stop and wait, sitting down quietly to watch as Irie and I proceeded into the sagebrush. I didn't like to do this with him because of the snakes, but I allowed it, watching carefully. He loved to venture into the little chamisa tunnel ways, nose to the ground, alert as the cougar he so resembled, being a real cat, a wild cat, for just a few moments a day.

I would follow closely alongside, ready to grab him up if necessary, but nothing bad ever came of it. After some minutes, I would say "Irie could come," and lift him from the ground into my arms to carry him back into the trees where Olgee was waiting. I say, "into my arms" but it was really onto my extended arms where he stretched

himself into the position of a reclining court cat, front legs regally extended, head erect, eyes shining with the pleasure. He knew the walk was far from over.

The three of us paused along the stream resting on the bench, purring together, before we marched along the flagstone toward the front of the house, up the brick front walk up a few steps to the long driveway. Here Olgee stopped. Always. She did not want to walk the tenth of a mile driveway because it was studded with small rocks

driven into the ground over the years. It hurt her feet even more than the packed earth. She didn't like it, so she stopped. She waited for us there at the end of the brick path by the flower garden just as she had waited at the perimeter by the stream. Olgee knew what she liked and didn't like. I think she enjoyed the wait, observing the vast wilderness from a spot easy of quick retreat.

Irie and I would proceed to walk slowly up the driveway to the road, he prancing cautiously among the hard pebbles. Macho, macho cat. At the end of the drive by the gate, he would look up and down the dirt road which led north to Colorado, and south to Questa and then Taos. The base of the Latir mountain wilderness was only a couple of miles away to the east. We were at around 7800 feet in the Sangre de Christos, and Latir rose even higher. North we could see Mount Blanca, the Navajo eastern Sacred Mountain, Sisinagini, looming at 14,435 feet, and west the San Juan's on the other side of Sunshine Valley. It was magnificent. For many years I didn't want to be anywhere else.

"Irie could come." He would turn to follow me back to the end of the driveway where Olgee waited, but this time he would follow his secret trails through the sagebrush which he had

Cats, *continued from page 3*

established on those occasions when he had escaped from the house alone, making me crazy. He knew those trails so well that he moved fast, fast and alone, always beating me back to house, so that he would be proudly sitting there with Olgee by the time I arrived a few moments later, his golden coat rich with the smell of sage. I have rarely seen such joy on the faces of any living creatures.

There was one more stage to our walk, as we proceeded slowly in stately procession to the gazebo. We must stop at the “chipmunk condominium,” the woodpile, where those many small

animals held their breath immobile under feline penetrating concentration. If we waited long enough, sometimes one chipmunk might leap out in panic to dash along the garden wall with both cats happily in futile pursuit (at least usually futile pursuit).

Finally we arrived at the gazebo along the stream’s northern bank looking past Ute Mountain as far as we could see into Colorado. Nothing blocked the view all the way to the southern Rockies. The adventure over for the day, we sat quietly together, waiting for the alpine glow at the very last moment of sunset. These days were a long and happy parenthesis in our lives.

It was a walk worth taking.

Irie and I moved back to Montebello without Olgee, who is buried by the stream where she always waited for us. By the time we came back to Alexandria, both Irie and I were getting too “ripe in years” for our old adventures. Irie spent his final years up to the age of 17 in the company of my current Abby, Shandin, a beautiful female, who gazed admirably at him as he peacefully observed Montebello life from his perch in our sun room. Shandin has never been outside and I don’t think she believed a word we told her about New Mexico! 🏠

Fitness Center, *continued from page 1*

the force required to open the doors is in excess of five pounds. This is evidenced by the fact that the BOD has contacted the contractor to make adjustments consistent with ADA regulations.

Although ADA regulations do not require automatic doors, residents do. If there are enough physically challenged residents to require automatic doors at the B3 level entrance of all buildings and the two entrances to the Community Center, why not the FC? Although the doors in question will eventually be in compliance with the ADA regulations, they still will not comport to the spirit of the law, which requires reasonable accommodations be made for people who are physically challenged.

I am well aware that cost is a factor, but cost is also a factor in replacing several pieces of brand new exercise equipment because residents find them incompatible with their physical abilities. When considering the total cost of the FC and the exercise equipment therein, plus the cost to replace several pieces of said equipment, the cost of installing automatic doors would be minimal and of great benefit to the residents of Montebello.

One must ask why it is necessary to go through four doors to access the FC. Because there is no direct access from the main hallway of the Community

Center to the FC, residents are forced to go through a locker room and a series of four doors. One must enter the locker room (door 1), exit the locker room (door 2) to enter the indoor pool area, exit the indoor pool area (door 3) and finally enter the FC (door 4).

Who designed this maze? This is of major concern because the locker rooms are gender-specific. When a couple, of the opposite sex, for example, one of whom is in a wheel chair, needs access to the FC, who will take that handicapped individual through the appropriate locker room to the FC? Fine, assistance can be obtained from the front desk, but that is not a reasonable accommodation. And as far as getting help from the front desk goes, I would be remiss if I did not address weekends, when there is only one person in the office who may or may not be of the sex required to accommodate a resident’s access to the FC. What then?

Additionally, I do not think it appropriate for little children of the opposite sex to have to walk through the locker rooms and see people in various stages of undress in the showers. After all, the BOD does not want them to even see the words **BIG ASS** on a fan.

Moving a wall and reconfiguring the doors would eliminate this awkward maze, especially for residents who are physically impaired. For example; a

door going from the FC ante room to the indoor pool area would eliminate going through the locker rooms. Placing a door at the top of the walkway ramp of the indoor pool and raising the current half wall to the ceiling between the new ramp door to the existing door used to leave the indoor pool area (door 3). This change would also eliminate the need for door 3. By installing the new door and extending the wall to the ceiling, air flow and temperature will still be maintained. If the concern is losing the view of the inside pool from the elevated hallway, the use of a glass or Plexiglas extension of the wall will maintain the view.

With \$7 million in reserves, to which is added approximately \$2.5 million annually, cost should not be an issue when considering the above-stated concerns. If planning and design for the party rooms is a reasonable expense, and expensive Bad Ass fans are a reasonable expense, why not upgrading the doors and a redesign to eliminate the existing maze required to get to the FC?

The health and wellbeing of Montebello residents vis-à-vis the FC should be one of the top priorities of the BOD and Management. Therefore, I urge the BOD to thoughtfully consider these recommendations and not discard them out of hand simply because the FC is a done deal. What would the Realtors think? 🏠

What does it mean to be an American? Who are we as a people? A nation? What is our role – individually and collectively – in today’s America and in the world?

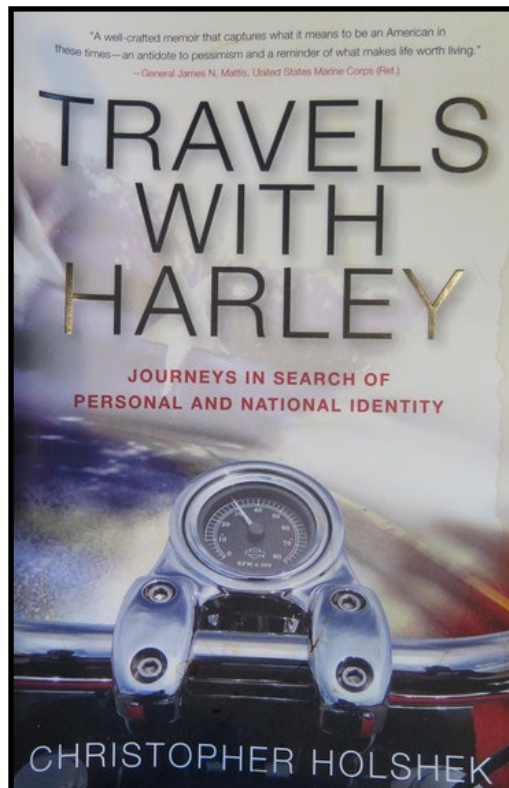
These complicated, no-single-answer questions are at the core of the often-brawling debate taking place as the primaries to choose presidential candidates unfold. Although they are not being posed in those terms.

Nor are these questions new. They go to our beginnings, revisited and re-answered throughout our history. In documents and actions – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, the Monroe Doctrine, the Civil War, the Gettysburg Address, World War II, I Have a Dream. And by our writers – John David Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Carl Sandburg, Mark Twain, Laura Ingalls Wilder, John Steinbeck.

Add to that incomplete list Christopher Holshek’s engaging new memoir *Travels With Harley: Journey In Search of Personal and National Identity*. As one of the Army’s most experienced civil affairs officers with over 20 years of his 30-year career abroad Col. Holshek brings well-honed experience and nuanced observations to these questions.

He, like all of us who live and serve our country abroad, had the unique privilege of experiencing other places, people and ways of thinking first hand. And the responsibility of representing our country and becoming the face of America to colleagues and acquaintances. Which affords insight into being an American from the outside in – observing our own country, its people and its ideals through other eyes. And from the inside out – understanding how being an American shaped our views of our selves, our country and the world. Enriching though this process is, the lessons learned are not always what we expect, starting with that we discover more about ourselves than about them.

“Seeing my country and myself from the viewpoint of other cultures and in



Seeing America and ourselves from the outside in

By Margaret Sullivan

a more global context has made me a better American and a better person,” Holshek recently told ESPN Radio’s “Over the Ball,” explaining how he learned to appreciate soccer.

In 2010, as he prepared to retire, Holshek wanted to reconnect with his homeland and provide closure to 30 years in the military. So he rode his new Harley-Davidson over 8,000 miles around the continental United States, starting and ending in suburban Washington, D.C. Inspired by John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley*, he saw the trip as a rediscovery of his own American identity and what that may mean writ large as the Nation looks to re-define its place in the world. *Travels with Harley* is the timely result.

In this multilayered memoir, body, mind, memory, machine, road, and scenery are linked and find balance.

The ride, south and west across the country to California then north and back east to Virginia, provides the structure for *Travels with Harley*. Its richness and depth come from Holshek’s intertwined ruminations on this specific trek (where he was often alone with his recollections), the landscape through which he travels, and the longer voyage of a civil-military career devoted ultimately to peacekeeping combined with meditations on where this country has come from, where it is going and how it all melds.

America, he writes, “is a rich and rough country. Its breathtaking scenery belies the fierce challenges of an environment that has helped shape a national character forged in struggle. ... More than cars, motorcycles are appropriate metaphors for the elemental American quest for freedom in individual and social mobility.”

“You can only move forward on a bike,” he told me. “There’s no reverse gear.”

In his *Huffington Post* excerpt from the book he observes,

“America is in and of itself a journey – more than three hundred million of them – whose signposts are frontiers and whose ultimate destination is the world’s and thus uncertain. It is the greatest collective adventure the world has ever seen. The arc of that collective journey is often a slow, imperfect, torturous, violent, but inexorable march toward freedom and a more perfect union.”

Beginnings shape a trip. Rather than go to West Point near his upstate New York home, Holshek opted for New Mexico Military Institute, then returned east, earning an interdisciplinary double major in international affairs and German at George Washington University.

“Both turned out to be fateful decisions,” Holshek told me for an article I wrote shortly after his ride. “Not just because it introduced me to ‘thinking outside the box,’ but also a career of working in civil-military affairs and other spaces in between.”

These tours led to rebuilding and peacekeeping assignments in the Balkans and then to Iraq, where he commanded the first civil affairs battalion to deploy there, as Tom Rick's bestseller, *Fiasco*, explains. His final tour of duty abroad was as Senior U.S. Military Observer and Chief of Civil Military Coordination at the UN Mission in Liberia – "one of the few American officers wearing the UN blue hat."

His discussions of his work in civil affairs and the related value of 'soft power' (both diplomatic and military) in America's foreign affairs are particularly revealing and cogent. "It's all about building relationships," Holshek explains, because "that's how you really get things done, over here or over there."

Whether in peace operations, counterinsurgency, or counterterrorism, the key is to remember that it's "more about them than us." In his reflections on Iraq, Holshek provides details about how he did not provide solutions but turned the tables and asked community leaders how they would solve their problems and then worked with them through problem-solving processes to empower them. Holshek also established a relationship with the imam, which gave his efforts their credibility and also helped protect his soldiers.

Whether in Bosnia, Iraq or Liberia, Holshek came to learn that,

"Civil-military operations and peace building are ultimately about transition management – from conflict to peace and military to civilian lead. Building peace is about maximizing stakeholders and minimizing spoilers by empowering the former, marginalizing the latter, and converting the uncommitted through the example of success."

In the middle of his national journey, Holshek took a global excursion to escort a group of the George Mason University students to Liberia. Many had never been outside the United States or in Africa. Thus they brought new eyes to the week. Holshek, on the other hand, was returning to a previous assignment for the first time and was able



Christopher Holshek

to relay the lessons he learned about engaging others abroad to the students. He left feeling "a bit better about my own country, because I had the vantage point of once again learning to see it from the outside in."

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Returning to California and heading "back east," Holshek's understanding of himself and America crystalized. He would later write:

"The significance of America is that its citizens identify themselves based mainly on an idea ... Unlike identity in most countries, American identity in its diversity is a strength not a vulnerability. E Pluribus Unum... The fate of this nation of nations is, inextricably linked to the fate of the world and vice versa. What happens over here matters over there; but what happens over there also matters over here... America has globalized just about everything but itself. The world we largely created is now closing in on us, and we don't like it very much – it means we have to change our


profligate ways, get out of our comfort zones, get in the global sandbox and play nice with the others, and compete and collaborate according to rules that suit others and not just us."

In terms of both personal and public sense of identity, Holshek says the takeaway from his travels with Harley is that:

"You have to learn from but let go of the journeys of the past to be ready for the journeys of the future. ... At the center of everything in our public lives is citizenship. Citizenship is ultimately a form of service to others. ... By answering the constant call to citizenship – local, national and global – we embrace and renew the strength and promise of American reinvention and renewal."

The end of one journey starts another. Peace-building, he says,

"Works the same way over here as it does over there. That does more than connect us to our communities, society, and the world at large. There's plenty of opportunity in your own neighborhood to get on the pathway to being a better global citizen and a better American. And when you serve your community, you serve your country."

Travels with Harley is well worth the read for the journey it recounts. But it is much more than a book. Its positive, empowering message – timely and appropriate in these times – has become a platform for another trip around the country later this year. The National Service Ride Holshek is leading is designed to help especially younger Americans understand the value of citizenship, service, and engagement, not just for their communities and country, but also for themselves. 

Author, artist, and traveler Margaret Sullivan is a former long-time resident of Montebello. This article initially appeared on her blog on the Huffington Post and is reprinted with her permission. Until recently, Chris Holshek lived at Montebello; the motorcycle ride around the country he describes starts and ends in Montebello, although he doesn't say so specifically. For additional information about The National Service Ride project and to order a copy of the book, go to www.nationalserviceride.net.

Yes! To lifelong learning

By Jeanne Tiff

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at American University (informally, OLLI) is dedicated to the proposition that learning is a lifelong process and that **curiosity never retires**. Drawing on the talent and experience of seasoned learners in the Washington, D.C., area, the program offers a unique opportunity to continue learning at the university level. OLLI operates very much like a small liberal arts college. Their web site is at www.lli-dc.

Let me tell you about the courses I took in the fall and spring semesters in 2015-16. I had compared the AU program to those at George Mason and Johns Hopkins (in Gaithersburg) and chose AU for the greater variety of subjects in its offerings. It is also slightly cheaper. You can sign up for up to six courses for \$275 total at AU. Some people do six, but I found that three courses were too much on top of everything else I do for AiM, my church, and my photography. Some courses have reading or other homework. Optional, of course, but you miss a lot if you don't participate fully.

Last fall I took a course in climate change taught by a World Bank economist who has made this issue the focus of his retirement, and a course in U.S. poet laureates taught by a retired literature professor. This year I took a course reading Charles Dickens' last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, taught

by a specialist in Victorian literature, a course in Signs, Symbols, and Archetypes, taught by a retired attorney who also teaches a course in fairy tales, and a course in collage-making taught by an artist who specializes in that medium. Though this course turned me on to making collages, I could not manage the time to develop new work to take in to next week's class. However every single class was in its way compelling, fascinating, and enriching. An added benefit is getting acquainted with classmates, all of whom tend to be interesting and accomplished people in their own right, providing insights into the topics from their own perspectives.

OLLI issues its catalog both in print and online well ahead of the upcoming semester. Morning and afternoon classes are 2 hours long, with a 10 minute break. You sign up for the courses

you want in order of preference, pay your fee, and await the results of a lottery run on a certain date. This assigns you to courses you have chosen ac-

ording to the number of students the teacher has specified and your position in the lottery results. You receive an email with your assigned classes, times, and locations.

It takes me about 35 minutes to get to AU from Montebello. Afternoon classes tend to end at 3:30, which can catch you in rush hour traffic coming home unless you're careful. But I found it all very well worth it. I'll be pleased to answer your questions about my experience. 📧



A sculpture made of found objects

Art from the heart

By Linda Mansy

Looking for an ideal creative event? I will be leading an artistic play date, Music & the Magic of Sculpture, on Saturday, May 7, 1:30-3:30 in PR 1. Everyone ages 6 to 106 is invited.

Everyone creates their own personal abstract sculptural item and no art experience is ever necessary.

I have taught this esoterically focused class for over 20 years in university design curricula, home school venues, and elder care living. I request to open one's initial realization of space with quiet intent body movements while singing, humming, whistling, or self-drumming. This spacial art exercise expands and recognizes 3D freedom.

Then I add this landscape of sound to engage multi-sensory design images. There are no rights or wrongs, no good or bad execution... no judgment of product outcome. Rather, a lingering freedom permitting one's art soul forward is the smiling exodus of this art event.

Each participant is asked to bring any materials he or she may wish to use or share: cardboard, foam core, styrofoam, poster board, Play-Doh, fabrics, found objects, boxes, spheres, glue, tape, string, ribbon, attachments, photos, memorabilia). Use your imagination!

Please reserve your spot by May 5 at lindajoe2@verizon.net or call me for further queries at 703-960-0611. 📧

The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you: musings, travels, announcements, photos, book reviews, commentary, memoirs, essays, analysis, poems, suggestions, club news, photographs, and free ads

A twice-monthly publication for the residents, by the residents

Along the waterways of hidden Myanmar

Story and photos by F. Vee Harrison



My trip to Myanmar this March with a friend was truly a memorable one and exceeded our expectations. The highlights of this trip were the Yandabo Village, famous for its pottery-making, and the Chin State, a mountainous region with elevations over 4,000 feet that recently opened up to tourists.

Visiting the Panyo village in Yandabo, we were fortunate to be invited into a family's home where we watched the pottery process and even were fortunate to operate the pottery wheel with our leg. It looked easy, but proved for us, novices, to be difficult.

Here pottery is made for functional purposes and it is their main source

of income. Learned a lot about pottery and other aspects of their life. Water buffaloes are used for transporting pottery material and the pots themselves. We saw water buffalo in the water to take afternoon dips which they needed to keep them healthy. Met simple, hardworking people who opened up their homes to us and were happy to meet us. This area is not as jaded as other countries exposed to tourism yet. The children

we met along the way were so friendly and delightful. The people were happy about their new president, The Lady, and are optimistic about their future.

Visiting the Chin State which occurred towards the end of our trip was also another highlight which holds many dear memories. This area is one of the poorest areas of Myanmar. Traveling in a jeep on winding, bumpy, and sometimes dusty roads that were under construction was truly an adventure. Houses were built on the edges of cliffs and this area was full of children. Our driver was a pro in navigating these roads and we knew we were in safe hands. Aside from our main guide we also had a guide from the Chin area as well for this part of our trip. We passed water buffaloes, cows, and goats that sometimes blocked our path.

Our first stop was the Taung Pu Lu Buddhist Monastery in Mindot that housed 29 children. We donated medical supplies to this monastery, which we had purchased in more affluent places in Myanmar. These supplies were very much needed and appreciated. Along our way we saw older pipe-smoking women some with their faces tattooed. Then we were off to Kanpitlet and the Kanpitlet Orphanage where we were greeted by many excited children. There are 55 children living there ranging in age from infants to teens. We donated school supplies that were also purchased along our travels. What



Water buffaloes cooling off in Yandabo River



So many wonderful memories, images, and adventures along the way that made us fall in love with the people, culture, and their unique surroundings. Our guides were friendly, personable, and so knowledgeable which only enhanced the experiences that we had. Only a handful of tourists along the way, for the most part, in our favorite places.

We highly recommend Jack Tydeman of Audley Travel, jack.tydeman@audleytravel.com, which helped plan our trip to all that are considering traveling to Myanmar. 🙏

Photos: Young monks in training touring a temple

Vee (in yellow) with her friend, take a ride along the river, which shows houses on stilts to prevent flooding during the rainy season.

A local woman navigating her canoe. People use a special rowing technique with oar and foot due to the heavy underbrush.

a special time that was for all, including our guides and driver.

Before we left the Chin State, we went to its highest point, Mount Victoria, which is 10,200 ft. high and is now a national park. The views were truly breathtaking with different kinds of trees and some vibrant flowers popping up sporadically.

Water, water everywhere – we also experienced floating gardens and markets, special canoing techniques,

Water, water everywhere – we also experienced floating gardens and markets, special canoing techniques,

Board candidates answer resident questions at a forum

By *Mikhailina Karina*

More than 100 residents filled the Community Center during the Sunday night Meet the Candidates event. It was an evening of tough questions, straight answers, and potential solutions.

As during many past Board meetings and town halls, residents were asked to submit written questions to the moderator, Elections Committee Co-Chair Joel Miller, who then read them to the candidates. This practice is meant to prevent any negativity or lengthy, soap box-y comments from the residents. Ironically, it hinders truly open communication among residents, one of the major areas for improvement cited by all Board candidates. In addition to being a moderator, Miller was also an MC, as he interspersed the questions with humor and respectfully quieted hecklers on several occasions.

Only one Board candidate, Gail Parker, was not in attendance.

Most opening statements were recitations of professional résumés, Montebello involvement, and important issues facing our community. Peg Wesbecher, speaking without notes, has a reputation for not mincing words as she frequently speaks out at Board meetings. “I don’t like to pontificate. I’m short and to the point,” she said. As a first-time candidate, she said it was time to stop the “group think” that results from “recycling previous directors and their spouses.” She did not have kind words for the current Board. “The owners feel disenfranchised. Why?” Because, she said, “are they not listening, are they not very smart, or both?”

Bonnie Daniel, another first-time candidate, a retired teacher and school administrator, took a kinder, gentler approach. “As a community, we want a pleasant atmosphere, not a grumpy one,” she said. “Patience, collaboration, respect, and kindness” are the best way to bring about change.

Several times during the evening, former Board member John Powers repeated a mantra relating to prioritizing projects and the Board’s fiduciary responsibility. “We have to differentiate between what we *must* do, what we *should* do, and what would be *nice* to do,” he said.

An unnamed resident asked the candidates how they would improve timely communication at Montebello.

Daniel suggested short meetings with Board members in the buildings. Former chair of several committees and wife of a former Board member, Trish Gowland said she’d look into the closed-captioned cable TV channel to watch Board proceedings in the comfort of one’s home. The only incumbent candidate, Doug Kleine, proposed “listening sessions.” Three-time Board candidate Lauren Pierce mentioned the possibility of free telecommunication meeting options to hear the recorded meetings on telephones. Powers proposed more small ad hoc committees, which are a “true back and forth.” Both Jerry Stedje and Wesbecher said one of the big issues is letting the residents speak during the decision-making process, not after the vote has been taken. Realtor and long-time resident Tillie Cassidy, another first-time candidate, wants the residents to tell the Board how to improve communication.

Resident Mary Tjeerdsma asked how the candidates proposed to improve Montebello’s gardens and landscaping.

Everyone mentioned the need for erosion control and better landscape management. Daniel said Montebello has suffered a major loss of trees: 30 were lost and not replanted during Hurricane Isabel in 2003 and 40 more were taken down – six of them she called “old-growth” trees – during the Fitness Center construction. Stedje, another proponent of improved landscape management, said the grounds are full of dead trees, stacks of branch-

es, and unmanicured areas. “We need to really invest in our grounds,” he said. “Spend more money to make it a priority for the future Board as much as the Fitness Center was for the past Board.” Gowland, giving thoughtful and diplomatic answers, was optimistic that the new landscape management company will improve Montebello’s appearance. “Don’t give up hope,” she said.

Hugh Schwartz asked the candidates about the Board increasing the number of committees while investigating low committee participation.

“I am not a fan of Board-appointed committees,” said Stedje. “All committee membership should be open. They are packed with the same people.” He added that people don’t volunteer because committees require certain backgrounds. “It’s a silly idea for the Board to be studying why people don’t participate.” Relaxed and comfortable with public speaking, his turns of phrases elicited occasional laughter from the audience.

Pierce, a member of several committees, was polished and to the point as she echoed Stedje’s comment. “Committees should be filled with volunteers, not Board-appointed residents. Our community is filled with intelligent residents of many backgrounds. If we are polite, respectful, open, and encouraging to residents, then we will have committees.”

Klein, a professional association management consultant, disagreed with that assessment. He said the only Board appointees are to Covenants and Elections committees, as mandated by by-laws. But anyone can join all the general committees.

Another unnamed resident asked the candidates to name the most important issues facing Montebello.

Wesbecher said the touch-screen monitors that have been hanging in building lobbies for several months are not the best use of resources. Stedje,

Cassidy, Pierce, Kleine, and Daniel cited the woodlands management and landscaping. Gowland said, “for health and safety, fire alarms and communication need to be updated.”

Sue Priestland, a resident who gets around in a motorized wheelchair, asked about inadequate handicapped access to the Fitness Center.

“I am surprised it’s an issue,” responded Daniel. “I assumed we were in compliance with the federal law.” While serving on the defunct Planning and Design Committee, Pierce said handicap accessibility was a priority.

“The bigger issue is how it happened,” said Stedge. “There should have been a checklist” of all completed projects “before the contractor walked off the site. If a resident has to complain, then the association has failed.” Likewise, Wesbecher said, “I was floored there was no push button on the doors. It’s uncalled for in this day and age.” Powers, chair of the Fitness Center ad hoc committee, said the pressure on the doors has been reduced to under five pounds and should open with the same ease as going into one’s unit.

Resident Denise Cumbee asked if

the candidates would consider replacing staff members if they were not responsive or respectful toward the residents. Everyone responded with an unqualified “yes.” Powers added that since 1954, he’s never enjoyed working with a manager as much as he enjoys working with General Manager Liz Foltin.

In addition, several times Stedge said the Board should stop micromanaging the management and let these paid professionals do their jobs. He suggested using performance evaluation benchmarks to gauge the management’s work performance. 📺



Toddlers with yummy footsies: (from left) Sophie, Sarah, Amédé, and Albéric

On the couch: Albéric as a preppie, Sophie as a Jazzerciser, Amédé as a New Wave musician, and Sarah as a yuppie – dressed for an ‘80s skit written by Sophie and Sarah for a school project.

THE WAY WE WERE



Life-long neighbors and friends, next year all four will attend Edison High School.

Photos by Diane Bastin



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Environmental Club president Cody Olander (in hat) explains composting and the inner workings of the worm factory during the Kids Club and Environmental Club Earth Day celebration on April 24.

Children made arts and crafts from recyclable materials and enjoyed an environmental story time.



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